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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: ELECTION PREDICTIONS

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The November 15 municipal elections in Kosovo, the first since independence in 2008, will test both the relative strength of Kosovo's political parties and the capacity of Kosovo's Central Elections Commission to organize the polls. We expect negative campaigning and concerns about the economy to result in the continuation of a decade-long slide in voter turnout in municipal elections, though a reinvigorated Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) could mitigate this trend. Prime Minister Hashim Thaci's Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) will be hard-pressed to hold all sixteen of the mayor's offices it won in its landslide victory of 2007. President Sejdiu's LDK, and, to a lesser extent, Ramush Haradinaj's Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK), will benefit from PDK's inability to repeat its 2007 romp. The November 15 elections are also a critical test of the international community's decision to go ahead with elections in three new Serb-majority municipalities and an expanded Novo Brdo despite the the absence of tangible municipal structures in them. We and the International Civilian Office (ICO) have worked hard over the last several weeks to energize the Kosovo Serb vote, breathe life into the new municipalities and counter Belgrade's obstructionism. We are cautiously optimistic that these efforts will produce a meaningful turnout, but it is not guaranteed.

On the other hand, information provided to us by various international election monitoring missions suggests the CEC will acquit itself well on November 15, and that the assistance the U.S. is providing to the CEC is paying off, though this may not prevent underperforming parties from attempting to lay blame for their shortcomings at the CEC's doorstep. END SUMMARY

OVERCOMING DECLINING VOTING TRENDS

12. (SBU) As the table below demonstrates, these first elections in independent Kosovo come amid a decade-long trend of decreasing voter participation in municipal elections. (Note: Raw turnout figures

provide the most accurate measure of turnout, since the voter lists continue to contain the names of emigrants and the deceased. End Note)

Table A: Turnout in Kosovo Municipal Elections

Year	Raw Vote Count	Percent Turnout
2000	721,000	79%
2002	711,000	53.9%
2007	565,919	36%

Post-independence disillusionment fueled by a weak economy and poor job prospects drive voter apathy here in general, while the negative campaigning seen in several races -- especially in Pristina -- could further drive down turnout. While an additional drop of roughly 100,000 votes cannot be excluded, we anticipate that stronger campaigning by the LDK will blunt the trend somewhat, resulting in a turnout of about 525,000 votes, a decrease of roughly 40,000.

STABILITY AND DECLINE

13. (SBU) While turnout has declined over time, two of Kosovo's three main parties -- Thaci's PDK and Haradinaj's AAK -- have presented amazingly stable results in municipal polls, as the table below shows. LDK, on the other hand, has gone from far and away the largest voter base in Kosovo to a distant second.

Table B: Municipal Results by Party (Raw Vote Count)

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Year	LDK	PDK	AAK
2000	398,872	187,821	53,074
2002	320,918	207,012	61,824
2007	129,642	189,012	56,676

14. (SBU) We contend that apathy among traditional LDK voters and weak party leadership caused the party's precipitous fall in the polls in 2007 and was the single largest factor behind the sharp decline in overall turnout (ref B). No matter what the cause, the result was a drastic reordering of the leadership in Kosovo's municipalities.

Table C: Mayor's Offices Won (by Party)

Year	LDK	PDK	AAK	Others
2002	20	6	0	4
2007	7	16	3	4

LDK WILL CLAW BACK SOME 2007 LOSSES

15. (SBU) PDK's big win in 2007 leaves the party with a number of (vulnerable) seats to defend, in many cases for the first time. In addition, having the lead role in the central government combined with running most of Kosovo's municipalities will make PDK the likely target for anti-incumbent public dissatisfaction rooted in concerns about the economy and perceptions that corruption is on the rise. That said, we do not expect any party to outpoll PDK in raw vote totals nationwide. While PDK will poll at or near its standard 200,000, we predict that a moderate LDK resurgence will see them pick up 3-4 mayor's offices nationwide. Ramush Haradinaj's AAK, seemingly stuck at roughly 60,000 votes for ten years, has an

opportunity to post its best results yet. AAK should easily surpass its high water mark of 61,824 votes nationwide, and could manage to control 4-5 municipalities when the December runoffs are through.

KOSOVO SERBS: OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

16. (SBU) With elections in four of the "five plus one" majority Kosovo Serb municipalities established under Ahtisaari Plan decentralization (Klokot, Ranilug, Novo Brdo, and Gracanica), the November 15 elections are a watershed event for Kosovo's Serb population. We, the Government of Kosovo, and the International Civilian Office have worked with Municipal Preparation Teams, with mother municipalities, and with the media to underscore the benefits of decentralization and to stress the importance of these polls to the Kosovo Serb population. The high number of Serb parties registered (over 20) and competition between ethnic Serb candidates in races across the nation give us hope for reasonably strong turnout. That said, threats from Serbian parallel structures to take jobs from candidates and increasingly strident calls to boycott the vote will not help. (Note: This latter phenomenon may itself be an indicator that Belgrade too senses higher-than-expected interest among Kosovo Serbs and is trying to counter this "unhelpful" trend. End Note) Serbian Government officials' refusal to permit the CEC to use Serbian schools as polling places adds organizational complexity and uncertainty to these first elections in the new municipalities and poses the most serious threat to Kosovo Serb turnout. We are cautiously optimistic about the possible outcomes in the new Serb-majority municipalities, but a low turnout among Serbs could undercut the legitimacy of the results and setback our decentralization efforts. Participation in the south notwithstanding, we expect only a handful of votes (literally) to be

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cast in Kosovo's three Serb-majority municipalities in the north.

CEC PREP ON TRACK, COMPLAINTS A POTENTIAL ISSUE

17. (SBU) Information from various international election monitoring missions -- including the USAID-funded European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations (ENEMO) effort -- show that the Central Elections Commission's (CEC) preparations for election day are largely on track. ENEMO representatives are concerned, however, that the independent Elections Complaints and Appeals Center (ECAC) might not be logistically capable of handling what could be hundreds of election day complaints that should be adjudicated within 48 to 72 hours. In a meeting with international stakeholders November 12, EU Special Representative Pieter Feith noted that efforts were underway to address logistics and capacity issues there. ENEMO will be joined in the field as monitors by a nationwide NGO effort led by the USAID-funded coalition Democracy in Action, as well as by a European Parliament delegation, 32 teams of short-term observers from the Embassy and surrounding U.S. missions, and a significant number of observers from the International Civilian Office, the British Embassy and other bilateral missions.

COMMENT: CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM

18. (SBU) While the last days of the campaign have been marred by violent incidents and wild claims of potential fraud, the campaign season and CEC preparations have proceeded rather well. A successful poll was never a foregone conclusion, particularly given the very late determination of the final number of municipalities to vote, but CEC representatives seem ready to hold Kosovo's first post-independence elections, and OSCE advisers at the CEC tell us that technical preparations are in good shape. Solid preparation and our efforts to support the process notwithstanding, we cannot rule out a raft of fraud allegations and conspiracy theories in the days following the polls, largely from those whose parties fall short of sometimes outsized expectations. We predict that LDK will show the biggest pick up both in raw votes and in mayor's offices it controls, and we suspect that PDK and AAK will have something to cheer about as well. On the eve of the polls, we are optimistic

that the elections will burnish Kosovo's democratic credentials and cautiously optimistic that the outcome will advance our efforts to build a genuinely multiethnic Kosovo via decentralization. END
COMMENT

DELL